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《 論 説 》

Top Global Soft Power?

Japanese Higher Education and Foreign Policy Goals

H. Steven Green

Introduction

Can governments use the internationalization of their nation's higher education system as an instrument for foreign policy? University education affects and creates knowledge, and spreads ideas around the world. At universities, students' opinions and critical thinking skills often take shape and determine how they will see the world for the rest of their lives. In these ways, tertiary education is an "international force"⁽¹⁾ and, as such, can become an important part of a country's reputation. The output of its university system can raise a nation's global profile. International students who enjoy their studies often return to their home countries with strong positive feelings toward the country in which they earned their degree.

As competition among universities becomes more international, some governments have started to play an active role in trying to globalize their country's higher education system. In 2014 the government of Japan announced that its Top Global University project would award annual subsidies to raise the internationalization efforts, and global rankings, of 37 selected universities. (Disclosure: The writer is employed by a designated Top Global University (TGU). All opinions and analyses expressed in this es-

(1) Philip G. Altbach and Patti McGill Peterson, "Higher Education as a Projection of America's Soft Power," *Soft Power Superpowers: Cultural and National Assets of Japan and the United States*, Watanabe Yasushi and David L. McConnell, eds., New York: M.E. Sharpe (2008) p. 37

say are the writer's own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Toyo University or MEXT.) This essay creates a framework for thinking about the Top Global University project as a soft power resource to help the Japanese government achieve its foreign policy goals.

International Higher Education Competition and Japan

"The world is going to university"⁽²⁾. By 2012, the global share of the student-age population enrolled in tertiary-education institutions reached 32% , up from 14% twenty years earlier, and in 54 countries the ratio was above half⁽³⁾. Growing middle classes and higher rates of education in developing nations generate international student flows. Data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) illustrate two key trends in international higher education- an increase in the number of students willing to study in another country and growing competition for them from outside the wealthiest nations. According to the latest UIS report on global flows of higher education enrollments, in 2013 over 4.1 million students, equal to 1.8% of all higher education enrollment worldwide, chose to pursue degrees overseas⁽⁴⁾. As the number of 18-year-olds in the wealthy countries continues to decline, universities seek international students to fill out their enrollment quotas and budgets. In 2013, 50% of all so-called mobile students went to one of five countries - the US (19%), UK (10%), Australia (6%), France (6%) and Germany (5%). However, the top five's share of students has decreased, from 56% in 2000⁽⁵⁾, due to the growing popularity of universities in other

(2) "The world is going to university," *The Economist*, March 28, 2015. <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21647285-more-and-more-money-being-spent-higher-education-too-little-known-about-whether-it> (Downloaded 06/28/2016 at 12:15 Japan Standard Time JST)

(3) *Ibid.*

(4) "Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students," *UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS)*, March 2, 2016 <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/international-student-flow-viz.aspx> (Downloaded on 06/28/2016 at 12:48 JST)

(5) Both sets of figures from *Ibid.*

countries. China, Malaysia, South Korea, Singapore and New Zealand attracted 7 % of the worldwide share of mobile students while Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE attracted 4 % .

As competition among universities has become global so have university rankings. According to Ellen Hazelkorn, advisor to Ireland's Higher Education Authority, the attention of university and political leaders has shifted from national- to international rankings⁽⁶⁾. In the world top 200 spots of The Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings 2016, 28 nations are represented this year. As might be expected, the institutions from the top five destinations cited above take the lion's share of spots, in particular those from the US, UK and Germany. The US leads with 53 schools in the top 200, followed by the UK (34), Germany (20), Australia (8) and France (5). Outside the top five destination countries, and arguably noteworthy for punching above their weight (such as Australia does), 7 schools in Canada and 21 in China are ranked in the world top 200⁽⁷⁾.

Unfortunately for anyone with a vested interest in Japan's higher education system, this year's THE rankings do not contain good news. The nation has just two institutions in the top 200; The University of Tokyo (43) and Kyoto University (88.) Reflecting shifts in the balance of economic power in Asia, The University of Tokyo is not even the No. 1 ranked university in the continent anymore, but has been replaced by the National University of Singapore. Various explanations try to make sense of Japan's underwhelming performance in global rankings including changes in citation practices, belt-tightening of public university budgets, promotion practices and "ingrained structural weaknesses"⁽⁸⁾.

(6) "Top Class," *The Economist*, March 28, 2015 <http://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21646987-competition-among-universities-has-become-intense-and-international-top-class> (Downloaded on 05/21/2016 at 10:48 JST)

(7) *Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2015-16*, Sept. 30, 2015 https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2016/world-ranking#!/page/0/length/25/sort_by/rank_label/sort_order/asc/cols/rank_only (Downloaded on 6/27/2016 at 05:55 JST)

Rankings are important not only for the esteem of university official and politicians, but also because, according to Hazelkorn, they “force institutions and governments to question their standards. They are a driver of behavior and change⁽⁹⁾.” In an age of both increased global student mobility and transnational competition for fee-paying students, no country’s leaders wish to see their nation’s tertiary education institutions lose prestige. As will be shown below, concern about rankings certainly drove the decision by the administration of Prime Minister Abe Shinzo to commit nearly JPY 8 billion over the next ten years to help three dozen Japanese universities globalize and raise their international ranking.

The Top Global University Project

Under Prime Minister Abe, Japan’s government has proposed bold plans and committed billions of yen to internationalizing Japanese universities and raising their global profile. In 2013, he publicly set a target of having 10 Japanese universities ranked among the top 100 schools worldwide by 2020⁽¹⁰⁾. A year later, Japan’s education ministry (Ministry for Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) unveiled its plan to reward 37 public and private universities (chosen from 104 that applied) with financial support “to enhance the international compatibility and competitiveness of higher education in Japan⁽¹¹⁾.” Each selected school has been granted

(8) “US dominance wanes in the World University Rankings 2015–16,” Ibid. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/big-beasts-strive-to-thrive-in-shifting-environment> (Downloaded on 06/28/2016 at 16:01 JST)

(9) *Op. cit.*, “Top Class”

(10) Suvendri Kakuchi, “Abeducation — A new push for higher education internationalization,” *University World News*, June 27, 2013 <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20130627113411208> (Downloaded on 06/28/2016 at 18:10 JST)

(11) All figures and quotes in this paragraph come from Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan, “Selection for the FY 2014 Top Global University Project,” *Press Release*, September 2014 http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/houdou/26/09/___icsFiles/afieldfile/2014/10/07/1352218_02.pdf (Downloaded on 06/25/2016 at 14:19 JST)

the status of スーパーグローバル大学 (*sūpā gurōbaru daigaku* , “super global university”), but officially dubbed “Top Global University” in English. The TGU project has two tiers- Type A (Top Type) and Type B (Global Traction Type). Type A schools are considered “world class universities that have the potential to be ranked in the top 100 in world university rankings,” while Type B schools are recognized as “innovative universities that lead the internationalization of Japanese society, based on continuous improvement of their current efforts.” The total budget is JPY7.7 billion for ten consecutive years (beginning in 2015.) The amount awarded to each school varies, but Type A institutions will receive more than Type B universities. The project’s general goals include “Structural change to form globally competitive universities in the world,” and “Stimulate cooperation with world class universities.” Specific goals include “Improving ratio of foreign faculty and students,” and “Increasing lectures in English.”

Japan is not the only, or the first, country to make a national project out of raising the international profile of its tertiary education system. One university president claims Germany’s relative strength in the THE World University Rankings this year is due to a combination of increased spending and the fruits of Berlin’s *Excellenzinitiative* of 2005, which has similar goals to the TGU project⁽¹²⁾. Moscow’s Project 5–100 was launched in 2012 to propel at least five universities into the world top 100 by 2020⁽¹³⁾. Other similar examples include China’s 985 project (1998) and former French president Nicolas Sarkozy’s plan to create a “Sorbonne league,” that would rival the Ivy League (2011)⁽¹⁴⁾. Nor is TGU the first attempt by national bureaucrats to guide Japan’s university system in a particular direction. Brian McVeigh outlines four distinct periods of state-

(12) Ellie Bothwell, “New faces take a seat at extended top table,” Times Higher Education World University Rankings, Sept. 30. 2015 <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/new-faces-take-a-seat-at-extended-top-table> (Downloaded on 06/29/2016 at 20:57 JST)

(13) *Ibid.*

(14) *Op. Cit.*, “Top of the Class”

university relations since 1945⁽¹⁵⁾. From 1945–55 relations between Tokyo and private universities were formalized, concurrent with the establishment of bureaus within the Ministry of Education. During the years of the most-rapid growth, 1956–74, the state developed distinct concepts of “manpower development” and “human resource utilization” that were handed down to universities as necessary goals of education and have continued into the present. McVeigh claims a 1962 white paper on education as the first official statement that education policy should be subordinate to economic policy. The period 1975–82 brought about a change in Tokyo’s attitude toward private universities from “no support, no control” to “support and control” of them based on a 1975 law that authorized subsidization of private schools. Finally, the period from 1983 to the present (or, at least, to 2005, when McVeigh published this analysis) was characterized by the creation of new bureaus within the Ministry of Education/MEXT to oversee universities.

The primary goal of Japan’s policy toward all levels of education has always been the development of “human resources (人材, *jinzai*),” ready to be trained and adjust quickly to the demands of Japanese industry. Acknowledging that, “education is tied to economic development everywhere,” McVeigh argues that Tokyo’s education policy, in particular, is deeply interwoven with the interests of Japanese business (to the point of being determined by them) in its demand for universities to prepare *jinzai*⁽¹⁶⁾. In the early part of this century, the concept *jinzai* has been modified into “global human resources” (グローバル人材, *gurōbaru jinzai*). The term has become a buzzword— a Google search of the Japanese-language version of the term yielded over 3 million references at the time of writing. Popular and academic understanding of the term

(15) All dates and key facts in remainder of paragraph are from Brian McVeigh, “Higher Education and the Ministry: The Capitalist Development State, Strategic Schooling and Revisionism,” *The ‘Big Bang’ in Japanese Higher Education*, J.S. Eades, Roger Goodman, Yumiko Hada, (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press), 2005, pp.84–88

(16) *Ibid.*, p.85

seems to be based on a definition provided in a report by a committee overseeing industry-university partnership in 2010⁽¹⁷⁾. The 2010 report identified three core competencies necessary for *global jinzai* in an increasingly globalized business world. These are: communication skills in a foreign language (particularly in English), ability to understand and take advantage of different cultures, and fundamental competencies for working persons. In 2011, under the direction of an advisory council⁽¹⁸⁾, the definition of *global jinzai* was adjusted to:

Factor I: Linguistic and communication skills

Factor II: Self-direction and positiveness, a spirit for challenge, cooperativeness and flexibility, a sense of responsibility and mission

Factor III: Understanding of other cultures and a sense of identity as a Japanese⁽¹⁹⁾

As the language of these factors shows, the government ties the idea of global human resources to national goals for economic success. These goals are broad and have behind them a long history of state- and business cooperation in policy-formation. (McVeigh's and Yonezawa's summary of this history are both recommended for learning this history.)

This essay proposes that the 2014 launch of the TGU project marks the start of a fifth phase of higher education guidance from Tokyo. It argues that Factor III above represents an implicit foreign policy goal within the government's *global jinzai* concept. The next section will consider how TGU is part of the Abe administration's

(17) Yonezawa Akiyoshi, "Japan's Challenge of Fostering 'Global Human Resources': Policy Debates and Practices," *Japan Labor Review*, vol. 11, no. 2, Spring 2014, p. 37. Yonezawa is an excellent source for a detailed, thorough review of the "*global jinzai*" term and its origins. The committee mentioned in the text is the Global Human Resource Development Committee of the Industry-Academia Partnership for Human Resource Development (2010) and was jointly released by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) and MEXT.

(18) The Council on Promotion of Human Resource for Globalization Development, established in 2011, and comprising the Chief Cabinet Secretary and five ministers. *Ibid.*, p.37

(19) Reproduced from *Ibid.*, p.39.

broader plan to increase Japan's soft power resources.

Soft Power and the Top Global University Project

Joseph S. Nye, Jr. invented the concept of soft power to explain phenomena that the conventional notion of hard power could not⁽²⁰⁾. Hard power emphasizes states' use of threats (e.g. military force, sanctions) and rewards (e.g. military assistance, market access) to get other actors in the international system to do what they would otherwise not do. The idea of soft power, on the other hand, is based on attraction. Rather than coercing others, soft power is based on coopting those who want to emulate the political or social values, or cultural products, represented by the state. If hard power is getting others do what you want, soft power is getting others to want what you want. Other people feel sympathetic to, or even fond of another nation, through commerce, culture and personal exchange. Therefore, a government may foster soft power as a resource by supporting business, cultural products and exchanges of people in all walks of life. The Top Global project is an attempt to promote Japan's soft power through exchange. To understand TGU as part of a policy for soft power, it is worth considering briefly two other government programs with implicit goals to promote sympathy and understanding for Japan.

In 2014 Tokyo launched the "Cool Japan" campaign to promote the global expansion of Japanese creative industries, and the values they supposedly carry with them. The campaign's name is based on American journalist Douglas McGray's proposal that "Gross National Cool"⁽²¹⁾ become a measure for Japan's new source for worldwide influence. He believes that Japan's pop culture represents an excellent opportunity for Japan to attract people around the world to its foreign policy goals and "regain the role it

(20) Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), Kindle edition

(21) Michal Daliot-Bul, "Japan Brand Strategy: The Taming of 'Cool Japan' and the Challenges of Cultural Planning in a Postmodern Age," *Social Science Japan Journal* Vol. 12, No. 2, pp.247–266, 2009, p.253.

briefly assumed at the turn of the 19th Century, when it...became a military and cultural power on its own terms⁽²²⁾.”

The Cool Japan campaign was started with a budget of \$371 million that was increased to \$ 1 billion by 2015, managed by the Cool Japan Fund, Inc. The campaign is a public-private initiative that will work closely with regional governments, towns, cities and banks to “pursue projects that show promise⁽²³⁾.” As an economic policy, Cool Japan officials aim to do for the creative industries what the former MITI experts had done for heavy industries in the post-war ear, i.e. pick “winners” and then protect and promote them. As a strategy to create soft power, official literature on Cool Japan proclaims, “Japan is a culture that appeals to the general population and that anyone can enjoy...We approach the creation of objects with a love for their beauty...At the root of this approach lies a spirit of harmony, which is evident in our philosophy of co-existence with nature⁽²⁴⁾.” Through Cool Japan, the image the Japanese state wants to project to the world is one of a nation with values worth emulating.

International exchange, of students and other types of people, is, for Nye, another part of public diplomacy that can enhance soft power. The most well known example of this type of diplomacy is the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program. Launched (in its current form) in 1987, the program invites thousands of young college graduates from English-speaking countries to live and work throughout Japan as assistant language teachers (ALTs) in elementary-, middle- and high schools, and in other roles with local authorities. The JET Program has grown larger than the Fulbright Program and the Peace Corps with a budget of about USD500 million⁽²⁵⁾. In a rather re-

(22) Douglas McGray, “Japan’s Gross National Cool,” *Foreign Policy*, November 11, 2009 <http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/11/11/japans-gross-national-cool/> (Downloaded on 06/28/2016 at 20:00 JST)

(23) Kauaki Nagata, “Cool Japan Fund chief says crafty marketing key to regional revivals,” *Japan Times*, Dec. 29, 2013.

(24) From Embassy of Japan in the UK, cf. Daliot-Bul, p.253, footnote 8.

(25) David L. McConnell, “Japan’s Image Problem and the Soft Power Solution: The JET Program as Cultural Diplomacy,” *Op.Cit.*, *Soft Power Superpowers*, p.19

markedly open statement about the program's goals, a director from the Foreign Ministry division that oversees the JET Program said, "From the viewpoint of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it is significant as a part of Japan's national security policy that these youths go back to their respective countries in the future and become sympathizers for Japan... [We] consider the JET Programme is [sic] an extremely important and at the same time effective policy instrument⁽²⁶⁾." Writing in *AERA* magazine, Fukuda Shin'ichi describes chance encounters with former JET participants during his travels across the United States and notes, with pleasant surprise, their knowledge of local Japanese lifestyles and customs and their fondness for Japan. He considers these anecdotes to be evidence of "Japan's long-term soft power strategy to form firm bonds of culture and international exchange." (このような息の長いソフトパワー戦略こそが文化と国際交流の固い絆⁽²⁷⁾.) In the eyes of both the state and observers, the JET Program is recognized as a foreign policy instrument designed to promote sympathetic feelings toward Japanese society. Combining the government's definition of a global human resource (which includes someone who can both understand other cultures, while maintaining a strong sense of being Japanese) and TGU's aim both to bring in more international faculty and students at the same time as dispatching more Japanese students abroad (whose strong sense of identity will, presumably, enable them to serve as cultural ambassadors for their home country), it is reasonable to consider TGU as a similar security strategy to the JET Program.

Whether or not TGU (or the Cool Japan campaign, for the matter) can succeed as a resource to increase Japan's soft power remains to be seen. It is too soon for any measurable effects to make themselves apparent. Nye's original idea came from his close study of nearly fifty years of America's global cultural influence in the post-war era and he concludes that, while pop culture can generate sympathy and fondness for a nation,

(26) The Jet Programme, cited in *Ibid*, p. 23

(27) 福田伸一、国際的事業「JET」で生粋の親日家が續々誕生, *Asahi Shimbun Weekly AERA*, Sept. 2, 2013, p. 7

it takes years, even decades, to obtain the desired outcome of coopting others. Nye also points out that the “effects of globalization depend on the receiver as well as the sender.” Information is not received in exactly the manner intended by the sender but “goes through cultural filters⁽²⁸⁾.” However, after nearly 30 years, McConnell points out that studies of former JET participants reveal complex views toward Japan that some JET alumni have after they return to their home nations. A not-uncommon attitude, represented by an interviewee in McConnell’s study, is one of admiration for certain things, e.g. of Japanese society, but “highly critical” of others, e.g. the Japanese government. As one alumnus told McConnell, “I now think of Japan as a delightful place of paradoxes⁽²⁹⁾.” Such a nuanced, but realistic view, could apply to most any society in the world. In this sense, the JET Program can be credited with promoting genuine internationalization. It hardly seems a stretch to predict that international teachers, researchers and students will return home with similarly nuanced perspectives thanks to their time in Japan as a direct- or indirect part of a TGU-sponsored program.

The nuanced view cited above may not be consistent with the government’s desire to effect sympathy and fondness for Japan through a soft power strategy such as TGU. In fact, one of the criticisms of the concept of soft power is that it is unilateral: While the resource itself is created by, and accumulated through, different media, the state remains, or tries to remain, at the center as the agent exercising soft power. In this regard, Yonezawa is skeptical that TGU can even succeed as educational policy. “The approach is too bureaucratic and will lead to ineffective micromanagement. It is very important to give universities more autonomy so they can respond to global change⁽³⁰⁾.” What’s more, the popularity of a country’s university system cannot make particular policies popular, as any American official working during the Vietnam or Iraq Wars could tell us. In addition, it is difficult, if not impossible to control the impact of culture and edu-

(28) *Op.Cit.*, Nye, p. 111

(29) *Op.Cit.*, McConnell, c.f. pp.26–27

(30) *Op.Cit.*, Bothwell

cation outside of one's own borders. Finally, soft power cannot be easily created or controlled by a state, nor can it be easily deployed. When addressing terrorist threats to Japanese people abroad, the prime minister of Japan cannot call up MEXT of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and order the deployment of TGU faculty or students to coopt the aggressors.

However, in as much as soft power relies on the feelings of people toward another nation, then Japan would already seem to enjoy a high baseline upon which to embark upon the TGU project. More than any other nation, Japan is seen as “mostly positive” in a BBC World Service Poll that measures global attitudes toward nations. According to the results, 58 percent of people view Japan positively compared to a mere 22 percent who see it negatively. Japan earns a higher positive and lower negative score than other countries with more universities in THE World Rankings top 200, such as Germany (56% positive, 16 negative), the UK (51, 20), France (48, 22) or the US (47, 33)⁽³¹⁾. Three of Japan's Asian neighbors, in particular, have a high regard for Japan. Pew Center data from 2013 show that Malaysia, Indonesia and Philippines, at 80 % , 79% and 78% percent, respectively, hold a favorable view of Japan. Only 6 % of Malaysians report an unfavorable view of Japan, and less than twenty percent of Indonesians and Filipinos do⁽³²⁾. These results were recorded before the launching of either the Cool Japan campaign or the TGU project.

If we consider how TGU may develop as a soft power resource outside of, or in spite of, the state's direction, then, as McConnell says of the JET Program, we may conceptualize it as a “smart foreign policy⁽³³⁾.” The TGU project will help selected universities

(31) “Views of US Continue to Improve in 2011 Country Rating Poll,” *BBC World Service Poll* http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/mar11/BBCValsUS_Mar11_rpt.pdf (Downloaded on 01/15/2015 at 16:36 JST)

(32) “Japanese Public's Mood Rebounding, Abe Highly Popular,” Pew Research Center, July 11, 2013, Pew Research Center Q 9 v, p. 5 <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2013/07/Pew-Research-Center-Global-Attitudes-Project-Japan-Report-FINAL-July-11-2013.pdf> (Downloaded on 01/15/2015 at 16:47 JST)

(33) *Op.Cit.*, McConnell, p.30

develop networks with countries all over the world, which will foster relationships, scholarship and cooperation that could become a soft power resource. These connections could be the most important effect of TGU; not to persuade people to like Japanese but to communicate with them⁽³⁴⁾. The fact that so many people worldwide seem predisposed to like Japan, already, would suggest less reason to see TGU as a foreign policy tool to be implemented from the top down than as a kind of public diplomacy with almost innumerable “diplomats.”

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(34) Thomas Berger as cited in *Op.Cit.*, McConnell, p.30. “The JET Program is not teaching people to *like Japan* so much as it is teaching them to *communicate with Japanese*.” (Italics in original.)